

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

On an Application for an

### OPENCUT MINING PERMIT or AMENDMENT

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is required under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). An EA functions to identify, disclose, and analyze the impacts of a proposed action. This document may disclose impacts that have no legislatively required mitigation measures, or over which there is no regulatory authority.

The state law that regulates gravel mining operations in Montana is the Opencut Mining Act. This law and the rules adopted hereunder place operational guidance and limitations on a project during its lifetime, and provides for the reclamation of land affected by opencut mining operations.

Local governments and other state agencies may have authority over different resources and activities under their regulations. Approval or denial of this Opencut Application will be based on a determination of whether or not the proposed operation complies with the Opencut Mining Act and the Rules adopted hereunder.

**Applicant:** Schellinger Construction Co, Inc.

**SITE NAME:** Blasdel

**LOCATION:** Section 1, T29N, R22W

**COUNTY:** Flathead

**DATE:** February 2010

**PROPOSAL:** The proponent has submitted an application to conduct opencut mining operations for sand and gravel on 9.6 acres of pasture land adjacent to US Highway 93 between Kalispell and Happy Valley (See [FIGURE 1 – AREA MAP](#)). The application would allow mining of up to 100,000 cubic yards of borrow material specifically for the adjacent highway construction project for Highway 93, and would be closed immediately following the project. The site would be finished mining and reclaimed by March 2008.

As part of the permit application, the proponent has submitted a Plan of Operation that provides baseline information, operation plans, and plans for reclamation that would replace soils, plant grasses and return the affected lands to a post-mine land use of pasture. Reclamation is required by the Opencut Mining Act and the operator must comply with that statute and the rules and regulations promulgated under it.

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<b>1. TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</b>	<p>This site is located in glaciated terrain adjacent to Highway 93 in the foothills of the Stillwater State Forest south of Happy Valley (See <a href="#">FIGURE 2 – SITE MAP</a>). The material was most likely deposited by glacial activity and possibly influenced by glacial Lake Missoula. Soils generally average 8 inches deep.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> Mining this area will result in irreversible and irretrievable removal of borrow material from the site and will create a small impact to the quantity and quality of soils from salvaging, stockpiling, and resoiling activities, but this would not impair the capacity of the soils to support full reclamation. There are no unusual topographic, geologic, soil or special reclamation considerations that would lead to reclamation failure.</p>
<b>2. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION</b>	<p>The nearest surface water is the Stillwater River about 1.5 miles to the west of the site. Significant vegetation and elevation differences preclude the potential for runoff into that water body. Groundwater is</p>

<b>IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	
<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>
	greater than 200 feet from the surface and will not be impacted by this activity.
<b>3. AIR QUALITY</b>	<p>Air quality in this area is generally very good with very little industrial activity. Wood smoke is usually the only pollutant observed.</p> <p>Fugitive dust that blows off the pit floor, stockpiles, gravel roads, etc. could be present at times. It is considered to be a nuisance but not harmful to health and would be controlled by watering during periods of activity.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> Air quality standards as set by the federal government and enforced by the Air Resources Management Bureau of the DEQ would allow minimal detrimental air impacts.</p>
<b>4. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY</b>	<p>The general area in this sloping terrain is planted as pasture grass. During soil stripping operations, all vegetation will be removed. Some seed and vegetative seed will remain viable in the soil and could assist in regeneration of those species when soils are replaced. The applicant will re-seed the area to species compatible with the post-mine land use of pasture.</p>
<b>5. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</b>	<p>Although the site is primarily grassland, it also supports populations of deer, some wintering elk, rodents, song birds, coyotes, foxes, black bears, raptors, insects and various other animal species. Population numbers for these species are not known.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> The proposed mine is expected to temporarily displace some individual species and it is likely that the site would be re-inhabited following reclamation to similar habitat.</p>
<b>6. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b>	<p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program has indicated that the Gray Wolf is a potential animal species that could be present in the region.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> The Gray wolf has not been found on this site. Even if suitable habitat did exist at this specific location, the disturbance area would be small and large areas of similar or identical habitat surround the site. The possible impact to this species would be minimal.</p>
<b>7. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES</b>	<p>The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has not identified any sites that have been previously discovered on this property. A walkover of the area by DEQ personnel did not reveal any artifacts or signs of occupation. No signs were evident at depth in the previously disturbed area.</p> <p><i>Impacts:</i> If during operations, resources were to be discovered, activities would be temporarily moved to another area or halted until SHPO was contacted and the importance of the resources was determined.</p>
<b>8. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY</b>	<p>Energy in the form of diesel fuel for dozers, loaders and trucks would be consumed while this site is operated and material is hauled to the highway project. Water in minimal amounts will be utilized as necessary for dust control.</p>

<b>IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION</b>	
<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES</b>
<b>9. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS</b>	This area is zoned as SAG-10 under the Schroeder Ridge Zoning District. The site complies with Flathead County's zoning regulations. The Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office issued a letter of compliance after determining that a portion of the site had been acquired for the highway and that material from the site would be displaced for construction anyway. It was stated that no material could be removed for any other purpose than the highway reconstruction project without applying for a Conditional Use Permit.
<b>10. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING</b>	None of these resources will be affected.
<b>11. AESTHETICS</b>	This site is clearly visible from Highway 93 and other businesses and residences in the area. A reclamation plan will ensure that over time the site will become visually acceptable.
<b>12. QUANTITY/ DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT</b>	<i>Impacts:</i> No impact on employment; the same crews will be utilized for all operations.
<b>13. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION</b>	This will be an industrial site with periods of stripping and hauling, as part of the highway project. <i>Impacts:</i> This site would be taken out of grazing production during the project and would be returned to productive pasture within several years of project completion.
<b>14. LOCAL, STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES, PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY INCOME</b>	Local, state and federal governments would be responsible for appraising the property, setting tax rates, collecting taxes, etc. from the companies, employees, or landowners benefitting from this operation.
<b>15. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES</b>	Minimal oversight from DEQ, MDT, MSHA, and OSHA.
<b>16. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	Industrial activities are inherently more dangerous than non-use of an area. The OSHA and MSHA regulations provide specific regulation and oversight to ensure safety is paramount.
<b>17. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES</b>	This site is not used to access any recreational or wilderness resources.

**18. Alternatives Considered:**

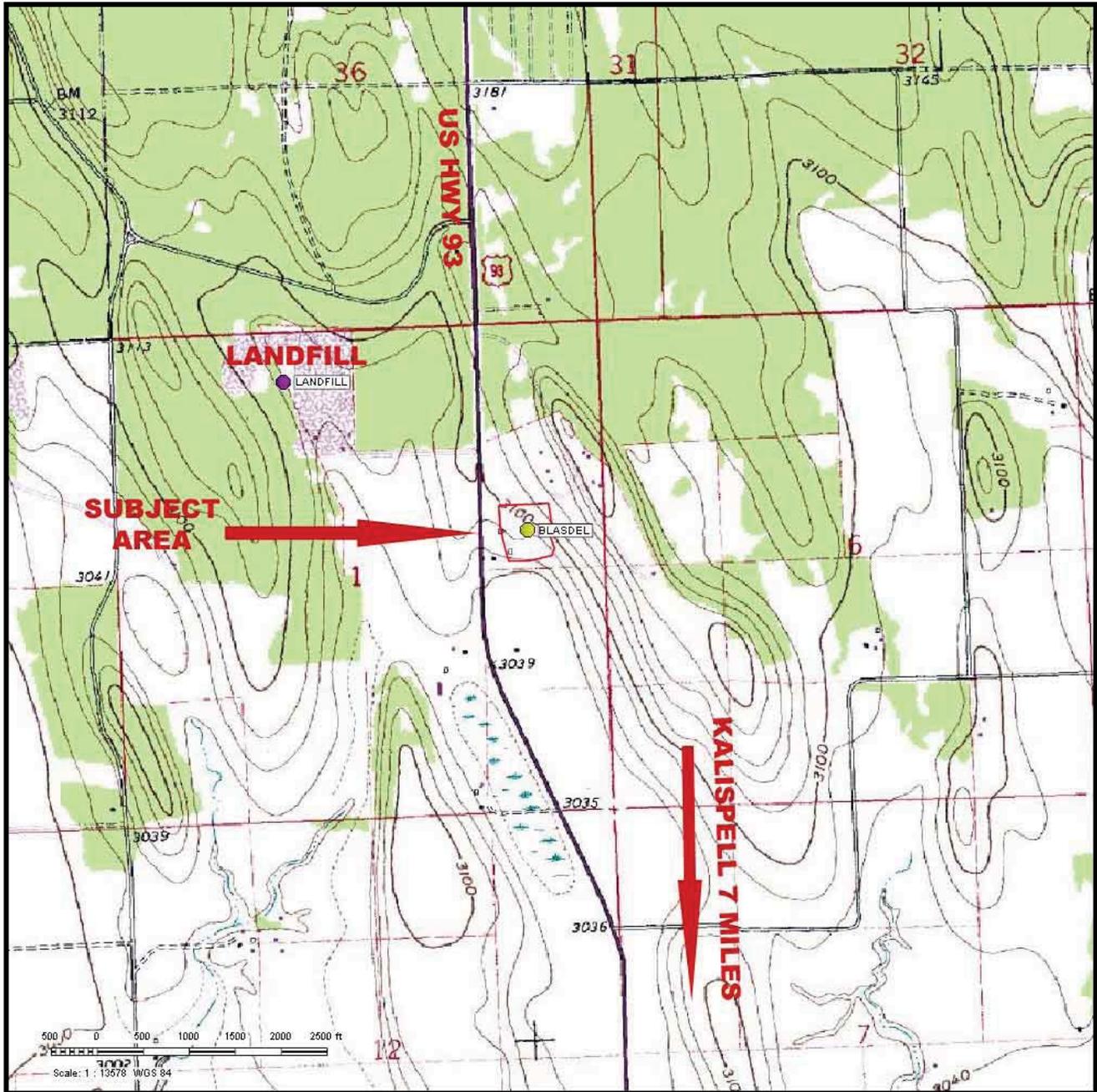
- A. Denial Alternative: The Department would deny an application that does not comply with the Act and Rules. No impacts to the natural or human environment would occur.
- B. Proposed Action Alternative: Approval of the application with mitigating conditions. The Plan of Operation has been written with mitigating conditions including hours of operation, water protection, soil salvage and full reclamation.

**19. Public Involvement, Agencies, Groups or Individuals contacted:** Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Natural Heritage Program, local planning department and Flathead County Weed District.

**20. Other Governmental Agencies which May Have Overlapping or Sole Jurisdiction:** Required:



**FIGURE 1 – AREA MAP**



**FIGURE 2 – SITE MAP**

